

MANAGEMENT
PLAN

Review and Approvals

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2. INTRODUCTION

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge is located within three counties (Noxubee, Oktibeha and Winston) in east-central Mississippi and consists of 47,542 acres. The refuge was established in 1940 from lands acquired through the 1930's Resettlement Administration. The refuge is administered through the refuge office on Bluff lake, Noxubee Co. Miss., and is one of over 500 refuges nationwide controlled by the Dept. of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Prior to government ownership, the land area within the refuge was extensively farmed and grazed for cattle. Fifty-three years later Noxubee is an excellent example of forest and wildlife management. This change brought about a return of bountiful wildlife populations and a progression towards restoration of the pine and hardwood forest types that were so devastated in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

The refuge encompasses 47,542 acres and has approximately 8,000 acres of inholdings within the proposed acquisition boundary. The inholdings on the refuge include 3,822 acres of state land (1,025 acres - Section 16; 2,797 acres - Mississippi State University) which will likely never be acquired. The remainder (4,263 acres) consists of scattered, small private tracts. Acquisition of these tracts will continue slowly, as few owners are willing to sell at appraised values.

Most of the refuge is forested with pine, pine-hardwood, upland hardwood, and bottomland hardwood, along with many old fields, 3 lakes, 4 green-timber reservoirs and agricultural areas, creating a highly diversified block of habitat. Approximately 42,500 acres of the refuge is woodlands composed of bottomland hardwood, upland hardwood, mixed pine-hardwood and pine species. These forest lands are occupied by a variety of upland species including turkey, deer and quail. The endangered red-cockaded woodpecker relies on the refuge for its existence in east-central Mississippi, primarily due to the excellent habitat found here. In addition many neotropic species greatly benefit from the forest types on the refuge. Four green-timber reservoirs (GTR's), two major lakes, numerous small ponds and sixteen small impoundments provide important habitat for wintering waterfowl, nesting wood ducks and bald eagles.

Over 110,000 visitors participated in a number of activities in 1993 including fishing, hunting, hiking, wildlife photography, wildlife observation, environmental education, and research. However, the majority of public use which the refuge receives each year comes as a result of the hunting program.

Approximately five percent, or 2,400 acres, of Noxubee NWR is classified as wetlands, the majority of which is found in two lakes, Bluff (1,200 acres) and

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Loakfoma (600 acres). The Prisock Moist-soil Management Area (MSMA), 220 acres, consists of 11 units or subimpoundments, each varying in size from 10 to 30 acres. Ross Branch Reservoir (43 surface acres) provides water for irrigation and early fall flooding for these units. The remaining wetlands are the Noxubee River and numerous streams, ponds, borrow pits, oxbows, sloughs, a few scattered field impoundments and GTR's 3 and 4. During the winter and spring months, the Noxubee River and its tributaries can inundate approximately 9,250 acres of the 11,789 acres of bottomland hardwood forest. Included in these acres are three managed green-tree reservoirs, GTR #1 (250 acres), GTR #2 (200 acres) and GTR #4 (500 acres). All of these areas provide important habitat for a wide variety of waterfowl and other wildlife.

Approximately 91 % of the refuge is forested (42,783 acres). Of the forested acres, 41,225 is under long-term management. Approximately 1,500 acres is in a proposed Wilderness Area, The Society of American Foresters Natural Areas and Areas of Special Consideration. Our forest management goal is to provide a broad range of diverse habitats to meet the needs of refuge wildlife. Increasing concerns about neotropical migrant birds will most likely alter our forest management as information becomes available concerning the habitat requirements of the most troubled species. This will be most true in the bottomland hardwood, a very important habitat type to high priority neotropical migrants of the East Gulf Coast Physiographic Province.

Forest habitat management on the refuge concentrates on maintaining forest stands of all age classes which are spatially distributed throughout the refuge. Maintaining old growth loblolly and shortleaf pine (100 + year old) stands is of great importance to meet the nest and roost requirements of the Federally listed endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. A general shift to a longer rotation age of 100 years for loblolly pine is being made along with a distribution goal of 10% per age class. This shift should meet the long-term goals for recovery of the red cockaded woodpecker(RCW) on the refuge.

Presently the refuge has two areas that have been established by the Society of American Foresters (SAF) as Research Natural Areas. The "Old Robinson Road Research Natural Area", containing 46 acres of SAF Type 101, Bald Cypress, was designated in July 1959. The other area, established in December 1973, is the "Morgan Hill Research Natural Area", consisting of 67 acres of SAF Type 49, Eastern Red Cedar-Pine Hardwood. These areas are protected for the primary purposes of research and education with natural vegetative succession continuing uninterrupted.

The refuge has one recognized National Historic Landmark (April 1975). It consists of a small 1.75-mile section of the Old Robinson Road; the first road in Mississippi to be built with state and federal monies. Built in the early 1830's, Robinson Road

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played a major role in state development by connecting Columbus with Jackson. Refuge management is designed to protect the 16-foot wide right-of-way. Periodic maintenance is performed to keep this small section of the road open.

In addition, the refuge has a Proposed National Wilderness Area, consisting of 1,200 acres of bottomland hardwoods, to be preserved under the Wilderness Act of 1964. The area was proposed as wilderness in 1974, but Congressional action has not occurred bringing this area under protection. In the interim, the refuge will continue to treat the area as wilderness.

Wildlife diversity is maintained through management of various habitats. This entails a forest management program which provides stands of varying species composition and age. Permanent and seasonally flooded areas and permanent openings (old fields and croplands) are also provided. Within these habitats are found at least 254 species of birds, 47 mammals, 34 reptiles, 23 amphibians, 25 fish, and hundreds of invertebrate species.

Several endangered or threatened species occur on the refuge including the American alligator, bald eagle and the red-cockaded woodpecker. A State endangered species, the wood stork, uses the refuge during the summer months.

3. CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITIES

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY: Executive Order 8444, dated 6-14-40

PURPOSE(S) FOR WHICH THE REFUGE WAS ESTABLISHED:

"... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife ... " Executive Order 8444, dated June 14, 1940

and

"... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 United States Code (USC) § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)

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OTHER APPLICABLE LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES:

1. National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended (16 USC 668dd-668ee; 80 Stat. 927).
2. Refuge Recreation Act as amended (16 USC 460k-460k-4). 50 CFR, Parts 26-32.
3. The Refuge Manual, USFWS.
4. Antiquities Act of 1906 (34 Stat. 225).
5. Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 as amended (15 USC 703-711; 40 Stat. 755).
6. Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929 (16 USC 715r: 45 Stat. 1222.
7. Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act of 1934 (16 USC 718-178h: 48 Stat. 451.
8. Criminal Code Provisions of 1940 (18 USC 41).
9. Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC 668-668d; 54 Stat.250).
10. Refuge Trespass Act of June 25, 1948 (18 USC 41; 62 Stat. 686).
11. Fish & Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 USC 742a-742j; 70 Stat.1119).
12. Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 USC 460k-460k-4; 76 Stat. 653).
13. The Lacy Act as amended 1981 (18 USC 42,c,1).
14. Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965.
15. National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 USC 470, et seq.; 80 Stat. 915).
16. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, NEPA (42 USC 4321, et seq.; 83 Stat. 852).
17. Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands (Executive Order 11644, as amended by Executive Order 10989).
18. Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 USC 1531 et seq.; 87 Stat. 884).
19. Refuge Revenue Sharing Act of 1935, as amended in 1978 (16 USC 715s; 92 Stat. 1319).
20. National Wildlife Refuge Regulations for the Most Recent Fiscal Year (50 CFR Subchapter C; 43 CFR 3101.3-3).
21. Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (S.B. 740).
22. North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1990.
23. Food Security Act (Farm Bill) of 1990 as amended (HR 2100).
24. The Property Clause of the U.S. Constitution, Article IV 3, Clause 2.
25. The Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 8.
26. The Refuge Administrative Manual, USFWS.
27. Archeological Resource Protection Act of 1979 (16 USC s-470aa).
28. The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937.

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COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION:

A Compatibility Determination (See Attachment 1), Environmental Assessment (Attachment 2), Environmental Action Memorandum (Attachment 3), Section 7 Evaluation (Attachment 4) and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (Attachment 5) have been prepared for this Hunt Plan Amendment. These documents are scheduled for approval by the Refuge Manager, appropriate Regional office (RO) authorities and the Region 4 Director (RD) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A funding statement has been prepared and is part of the Compatibility Determination (Attachment 1).

NOTE: This is not a major revision of the hunting plan or hunting program. It is, however, a collective document for all of the amendments and original hunt plan. It shall also serve as an update of previously approved types of hunts.

4. STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

As defined in 16 USC 668dd, Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations(50 CFR), Subchapter C, part 25, Subpart A, 25.11.b:refuges are established for the restoration, preservation, development and management of wildlife and wildlands habitat; for the protection and preservation of endangered or threatened species and their habitat; and for the management of wildlife and wildlands to obtain the maximum benefits from these resources. Also, there are the goals and objectives of the National Wildlife Refuge System, as defined in the Refuge Manual, that provide the framework for refuge objectives which are:

- 1. Threatened and endangered species maintenance and production.
- 2. Migratory bird maintenance and production.
- 3. Maintenance of native habitat types and their associated wildlife species.
- 4. Environmental education.
- 5. Wildlife interpretation.
- 6. Compatible wildlife oriented recreation.

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The objectives as stated in 8 RM 5.1 for refuge hunting programs are as follows:

1. To provide the general public with a quality wildlife-oriented recreational experience and an opportunity to utilize a renewable natural resource; and
2. To maintain wildlife populations at levels compatible with the refuge habitat.

Objectives of the Noxubee NWR hunting program are as follows:

1. Management of the whitetail deer herd to maintain the population at acceptable levels to prevent overpopulation and damage to the ecosystem.
2. Management of the raccoon population at acceptable levels to prevent excessive predation to wood ducks, Canada geese, neotropical migrant songbirds and other ground nesting birds.
3. To provide recreational hunting opportunities on a renewable resource.
4. To foster public support of primary refuge objectives through environmental education in conjunction with the hunt program.
5. To foster support of local environmental and sportsman organizations through interaction with the hunt program.

5. ASSESSMENT

As per 8 RM 5.3 (A)(1&2), the management purpose of Noxubee NWR is governed under the rules of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (see Refuge Purpose), and as such has never opened more than 40 % of its wetland acreage for the purpose of waterfowl hunting. Actually the area of the refuge ever opened for waterfowl hunting is only 18.75% of the total wetland acreage (see section on Waterfowl). As further detailed under 8 RM 5.3 (A)(2),...."Classification as an inviolate sanctuary imposes no restrictions or limitations on the hunting of non-migratory birds or other game mammals."

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Noxubee NWR has a history of over forty years of hunting. Populations of several species of wildlife have fluctuated due to various factors over the years. However, Noxubee NWR has been properly managed and has continued to provide a valuable renewable resource for the residents of the state of Mississippi and the citizens of the United States. Hunting is, and has always been, a valuable management and recreational tool utilized by professional wildlife managers. This is the case on Noxubee NWR as well. The following is a breakdown, by species, of target populations on Noxubee NWR.

WHITETAIL DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Hunting for whitetail deer was opened through the original Hunting and Fishing Plan for the refuge in 1960. Hunting for deer was re-authorized in the 1967 and 1979 amendments to the original hunt plan. Deer hunting has continued on Noxubee NWR for the past 34 years. The 1993 hunt season marked the largest harvest in the last 10 years for deer on Noxubee NWR, with a total of 637 deer being removed. Biological data and consultations with station, regional, Miss. State University biologists, and Miss. Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (DWFP) biologists are used in the development of the coming years' hunt proposals. All management decisions are formulated using the best of modern wildlife biology available.

Harvest data from the 1993-94 season indicated that body weights were slightly down from years past. An increase in the overall number of hunters being issued permits and more people filing their antlerless permits were responsible for a higher than average deer harvest.

Deer management objectives for the antlerless harvest and lactation rate for 2.5-year old does were met. However, weights for yearling bucks fell well short of the >90-pounds goal set as an attainment goal for the herd. This was a reflection of an abundance of deer, a poor mast crop throughout the refuge, and a very dry fall resulting in a reduction of forbes.

The sex ratio of harvested deer was well regulated through use of the antlerless permit system resulting in a 52% bucks and 48% does. Sixty-eight percent of the legal bucks harvested on the refuge were 1.5-year old animals.

Deer seasons will be held for archery, primitive weapons, general gun and youth/adult gun hunting in 1994-95. A fee permit system to hunt deer, instituted during the 1992-93 season, will continue the foreseeable future. In addition, a special youth only hunt will be held on opening weekend as a 2-day either-sex deer hunt. Deer hunts should be continued on the refuge to

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maintain the population at acceptable levels, to prevent overpopulation and damage to the ecosystem. The type and extent of hunts will depend on biological needs for herd management. The refuge manager with recommendations from station and regional biologists, Miss. State University biologists, and Miss. Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (DWFP) biologists will determine and set seasons as appropriate

WILD TURKEY (Meleagris gallopavo)

Population levels of the wild turkey continue to remain at excellent levels on the refuge. The 1994 harvest of 54 bearded birds represents the largest number of turkeys ever taken from the refuge, and reflects a estimated population of 800 birds residing on the refuge. The amendment for hunting wild turkey was officially permitted, approved by the Regional Director and incorporated into revised Title 50 in 1960. Hunting of wild turkey has continued over the last 34 years (spring gobbler season only) with no negative impacts to the refuge or surrounding populations. This hunt should be continued as a spring gobbler season, which represents a minimal affect on the population dynamics of this species. Population levels need to be maintained at or below present levels due to disease factors which can manifest in higher than normal populations.

Some concern has arisen that the number of hunters has led to a degradation of hunt quality on the refuge. It may be necessary in the future to institute a quota system similar to the deer hunts. If and when this becomes necessary, it will be at the discretion of the refuge manager.

COMMON SNIPE (Capella gallinago)

The amendment for hunting of common snipe was officially permitted, approved by the Area Manager(AM) and incorporated into revised Title 50 in 1980. Hunting of common snipe has continued over the last 14 years primarily as an incidental species taken by quail hunters. Due to the lack of hunting interest, and the fact that the common snipe occupies a different habitat from either quail or woodcock, authorized snipe hunting on the refuge will be discontinued.

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AMERICAN WOODCOCK (*Philohela minor*)

The amendment for hunting of American woodcock was officially permitted, approved by the AM; and incorporated into revised Title 50 in 1980. Hunting of American woodcock has continued over the last 14 years as primarily an incidental species taken by quail hunters. All state, federal and refuge specific regulations pertaining to the hunting of American woodcock on Noxubee NWR are applicable. Fluctuating populations due to environmental constraints make the dependability of populations suitable for hunting a limiting factor for hunting pressure and harvest on the refuge. Although Central Management Unit populations are in good shape on a national basis. Allowance to hunt American woodcock during state seasons should continue, as hunting poses no significant threat to this species.

WATERFOWL (various species, see below)

The hunting of Waterfowl was officially opened on Noxubee NWR (GTR #1 only) through the original Hunting and Fishing Plan of 1960. Waterfowl hunting was further expanded on the refuge with the opening of GTR #2 to waterfowl hunting by the amendment of 1979. Hunting for various species was controlled by state and federal regulations for take until 1987, when the season was closed by the refuge manager due to low local waterfowl populations. Primary species taken include: mallard, gadwall, pintail, ringneck and wood duck.

Canada geese have always been a occurring species on the refuge, and in 1958 the original stock for a resident population was received from Wheeler Refuge in Alabama. One year later additional stock was received from Horseshoe Lake Refuge in Illinois. This resident population has grown to over 500 individuals in 1994, with approximately 300-500 additional migratory geese (mostly Canada geese, although a few white-fronted and snow geese are seen) each winter. Although Canada geese are harvested by sportsmen off of the refuge, Noxubee has never been opened for geese hunting. However, due to increases in crop depredation by geese on neighboring property owners, a goose hunt may be necessary in the future. This procedure is detailed in 7RM 3.6 E. If a goose hunt is needed, it will be held at the discretion of the refuge manager.

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Waterfowl numbers continue to be very low and in 1993 were the lowest recorded during the mid-winter waterfowl census since 1987 with only 6000 ducks observed. The waterfowl season shall remain closed for the 1994-95 season, however, the decision to re-open a season will rest with the refuge manager. In the event a season is re-opened, special consideration should be given to youth hunts, handicap hunts, etc..

In the event that waterfowl hunts were reopened on the refuge, the hunting of waterfowl would be restricted to the areas already legally open (GTR's 1 & 2). Those areas are marked on the map marked "AREAS OPEN FOR WATERFOWL HUNTING" (See Attachment 6). Also, Waterfowl hunts will be charged under the fee permit system applicable to quota hunts within the USFWS.

SQUIRREL (Sciurus carolinensis, Sciurus niger)

Grey and fox squirrel occur on Noxubee NWR in huntable numbers. The first squirrel hunt recorded on Noxubee NWR was held in 1951, and the refuge was officially opened to the hunting of squirrel under the original 1960 Hunting and Fishing Plan. Further authorization for the squirrel hunt was obtained under the 1967 amendment. This hunt is probably the most popular hunt on the refuge, and affords thousands of hours of outdoor recreation. Squirrel hunting is the oldest of all hunts on the refuge, (42 years) and has caused no significant impacts to the species population or the environment. The squirrel hunt should continue in 1994 at the discretion of the refuge manager. However, concerns Statewide about fox squirrel populations may necessitate more strict regulations on the taking of this species in the future. Squirrel hunters have to abide by refuge specific regulations regarding the use of steel shot in the managed GTR's, to prevent accidental ingestion of lead shot by feeding Waterfowl in forested wetlands.

BOBWHITE QUAIL (Colinus virginianus)

Noxubee NWR was officially opened for the hunting of quail in 1966, and the hunt has continued for 27 years. The hunting of quail is one of the most popular hunting pursuits on the refuge. Quail hunting provides countless hours of outdoor recreation to refuge hunters. Substantial public support for refuge programs are received as a result of quail hunting. This is evident through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 1994 between the refuge and the Oktibeha County chapter of Quail Unlimited (QU). Quail hunting on the refuge should continue at the discretion of the refuge manager.

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RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*)

Raccoon hunting was officially permitted on the refuge in 1968, and has continued for the past 25 years. Removal of a segment of the raccoon population is considered necessary to reduce predation to waterfowl and other ground nesting birds (neotropical migrants, etc.). Raccoons can only be hunted effectively at night and with the use of dogs. This is the type of hunts allowed in the past, and scheduled for the future. Raccoons have been hunted with dogs and lights for at least the last 200 years in North America with no negative impacts to the population as a whole. The hunting of raccoons on Noxubee NWR is a necessary management tool and should be continued with the seasons and bag limits set at the discretion of the refuge manager.

OPOSSUM (*Didelphis virginiana*)

The hunting of opossum was officially opened on the refuge in 1968 through Amendment #3. Opossum is taken primarily as a incidental species by raccoon hunters, although it also is a predator of waterfowl and ground-nesting neotropical migrant songbirds. Since hunting poses no threat to the well-being of this species' population dynamics, hunting should continue at the discretion of the refuge manager as a incidental take species to raccoon hunting.

RABBIT (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*)

The hunting of rabbit was opened through the 1967 Amendment to the Hunt Plan. Rabbits are hunted primarily through the use of dogs and firearms. Natural mortality factors influence the population of this species, regardless of hunting pressures. Therefore, since hunting poses no threat to the population dynamics or numbers of this species, hunting for rabbits should continue at the discretion of the refuge manager.

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FOX (Urocyon cinereoargenteus, Vulpes vulpes)

Both species of fox commonly found in the South, red and grey, are present on Noxubee NWR. The hunting of fox was authorized on the refuge through Amendment # 2 in 1967, and continued for 12 years until discontinued through Amendment # 4 in 1979. Although fox do prey on waterfowl and other game birds, neither of these species occur in significant enough numbers to warrant reopening a hunt season for either of them. If, however, in the future, the refuge manager determines that a hunt for either of these species is warranted, it can be reopened at the discretion of the refuge manager.

BOBCAT (Lynx rufus)

Hunting on the refuge for bobcat was authorized through Amendment # 2 in 1967, and continued for 12 years until the hunt season was discontinued through Amendment # 4 in 1979. Although bobcat do prey on waterfowl and other ground nesting birds, this species does not occur in significant enough numbers to warrant reopening a hunt season for bobcat. If, however, in the future it is determined, that a hunt for this species is warranted, it can be reopened at the discretion of the refuge manager.

COMMON CROW (Corvus brachyrhynchos)

Hunting for the common crow was authorized on the refuge through the original hunt plan in 1960. Crows are well known for their predations on agricultural crops, such as the ones planted for waterfowl. However, this has not been a significant problem on the refuge. Hunts have not been held for this species since the 1970's, and it is recommended that the hunting of crows on the refuge remain closed for now. If, however, in the future, the refuge manager determines that a hunt for this species is warranted, it can be reopened at their discretion.

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COYOTE (Canis latrans)

Although a official season has never been officially opened for the hunting of coyote on the refuge, it is considered as an nuisance animal and detrimental to management purposes, and the public is allowed to remove this species during managed hunts for other species. This policy of removal of an exotic species is consistent with refuge policy as set forth in 16 USC 668dd, 50 CFR, 31.14, Official animal control operations (a). This will continue to be the policy of Noxubee NWR, and is consistent with Miss. state law.

FERAL HOG (Sus scrofa)

Although a official season has never been officially opened for the hunting of feral hog on the refuge, it is considered as an nuisance and the public is allowed to remove this species during managed hunts for other species. This policy of removal of an feral species is consistent with refuge policy as set forth in 16 USC 668dd, 50 CFR, 30.11, Control of Feral Animals (a).

BEAVER (Castor canadensis)

Although a official season has never been officially opened for the hunting of beaver on the refuge, it is considered as an nuisance animal and detrimental to management purposes, and the public is allowed to remove this species during managed hunts for other species. This policy of removal of an nuisance species is consistent with refuge policy as set forth in 16 USC 668dd, 50 CFR, 31.14, Official animal control operations (a). This will continue to be the policy of Noxubee NWR, and is consistent with Miss. state law.

NOTE: There are no other species of wildlife for which the refuge has ever been opened for hunting.

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6. DESCRIPTION OF HUNTING PROGRAM

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Programs (i.e. posters, talks, signs, leaflets, etc.) should be placed in appropriate areas to educate the public participating in the hunts and those not participating in the hunts. 8 RM 1.3 "POLICY", states,... "Unless prohibited by statute or regulation, both consumptive and nonconsumptive utilization are encouraged as a means of enabling the public to understand and appreciate the unique attributes of lands and facilities set aside for natural resource protection. All appropriate refuge personnel should become as knowledgeable as possible on refuge projects, objectives, management, etc., so as to portray a positive Service image to the visiting public.

Youth hunts should be utilized when possible within the confines of refuge purpose and objectives. These hunts will be scheduled by the refuge manager when appropriate.

There are currently three handicap blinds available for use by permanently wheelchair-bound individuals in pursuit of deer. Ideally, the youth and handicap hunt programs should be enhanced and expanded to encourage participation.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law enforcement efforts are an important part of all hunts held on Noxubee NWR. Compliance with such a large hunt program demands a significant law enforcement presence. Currently there are stationed at Noxubee NWR one full-time law enforcement officer (1802 series) and two collateral duty officers. Violations directly connected with the hunt program, during the 1993-94 hunt season resulted in 69 citations being issued (63% of all citations being issued). Law enforcement activities are concentrated on problem areas and serious violations. Specific problem areas for the last five years have been night hunting (both true poachers and early/late day hunters), general trespass, loaded uncased firearms, and compliance with state laws. Miss. DWFP Conservation officers provide additional law enforcement support to the USFWS refuge officers at all times, but particularly during the refuge hunt season. Coordinated LE details with State conservation officers (i.e. night hunting stakeouts, road blocks, etc.) have been extremely beneficial in ensuring compliance in recent years, and should be cultivated and continued in the future.

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A coordination meeting with local conservation officers, their supervisors, Justice Court judges and prosecuting attorneys has been held in the past and should continue in the future before the opening of the fall hunting seasons. This coordination is necessary because all cases are handled through state court with the exception of serious violations, which are handled through Federal court. This system of case disposal was formulated during the inception of Noxubee's law enforcement program in the 1940's, and has continued up until today. This long history of law enforcement cooperation has fostered several generations of both State and Federal officers and has been mutually beneficial for all involved.

SPECIAL WEAPON HUNTS

Refuge hunts will be conducted according to Mississippi state laws and regulations in reference to legal weapons which may be used. The USFWS reserves the right to be more restrictive , as per Service policy, in reference to legal firearms, types of ammunition, calibers, etc..

DEER/DOG HUNTS

Noxubee NWR will promote "still" and "stalk" types of hunting, and will not allow deer hunting with dogs on the refuge.

AGE

Hunting ages will be 10-15 for the refuge youth deer hunts. All youth hunters under the age of 16 must remain in the sight of an adult over the age of 21 at all times.

CAMPING

Although camping in Noxubee's primitive campground has been allowed in the past, in 1994 a compatibility evaluation was performed which determined that camping was incompatible was made which led to the decision to discontinue camping on the refuge. No plans are in effect to allow camping on the refuge in the future.

OPEN FIRES

Fires are prohibited on the refuge as detailed in 16 USC 668dd, 50 CFR 27.95.

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PROFICIENCY TESTING

No proficiency testing will be required for participants on refuge hunts. However, all hunters utilizing the refuge will be required to comply with Mississippi state laws pertaining to hunter safety courses.

REFUGE SPECIFIC REGULATIONS

All refuge specific regulations should be scrutinized closely on an annual basis as soon after hunt seasons as possible. Deletions, additions and changes to refuge specific regulations should be made by the refuge manager on an annual basis for inclusion in 16 USC, 50 CFR, refuge specific rules for the coming year.

PERMIT SYSTEM

Permits for managed big game (deer) hunts in 1994 will be issued on a first come - first served basis, and in accordance with the USFWS permit fee system. However, the permit system can change annually based on biological needs.

The number and type of deer hunt permits issued and the method of issuance will be determined on a yearly basis by the refuge manager. Management decisions will be based on professional skills and discussions conducted with deer biologists. All hunt programs should be discussed with station biologist, regional biologists, state biologists and Mississippi State University biologists on an annual basis.

Hunts (state season) for upland game (small game and turkey hunting) will not be regulated through a permit basis, but hunters will have to possess the appropriate state licenses. If permits become necessary for these hunts, it will be done similar to the permitting system used for big game hunts (See Section 5, Assessment).

SCOUTING

Pre-hunt scouting will be allowed at any time as the refuge is open to the public from sunrise to sunset. The exception to this would be during a managed hunt, when only individuals with a valid refuge permit would be allowed on the refuge.

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CHECK STATIONS

Check stations can/will be utilized to collect pertinent biological information necessary for sound management decisions by the refuge manager. Hunters will be required to check all deer and turkey harvested on the refuge at an advertised check station. A contract to administer the check-station has been the most cost effective method of collecting deer biological information during the gun deer season. The turkey check station has been a self-check type station. However, if the need arises, a manned station could be established.

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VII. MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

- A. There will be no significant conflicts between the hunting program and endangered species on the refuge. A Section 7 Evaluation of the Endangered Species Act has been prepared (See Attachment 4).
- B. Measures to reduce/avoid conflicts between various public uses include closing some areas to hunting which are favorite public use areas, and directing those members of the public who show interest into those areas. The refuge also presents numerous programs/presentations each year, stressing the importance of hunting to the general public.
- C. With a public hunting program as long lived as Noxubee's, the administrative program has evolved along with it. This is not to say that the hunting program precedes the administrative program, but rather that they work well together, as just another management action.

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VIII. CONDUCT OF THE HUNTS

The general conduct of the hunts to be held are displayed in the attached refuge brochures, and under Section VI, Description of Hunting Program.

The only anticipated response to the hunts are favorable. Hunting is a sought after and time honored tradition in Mississippi. The only negative response anticipated would be if a traditional hunt type were to be discontinued. Sound wildlife management combined with quality habitat produces game populations able to sustain reasonable hunting pressure. Noxubee's hunting program should promote hunting opportunity in conjunction with hunt quality, consistent with refuge purpose and objectives. All hunts scheduled for the refuge now and in the future should be based on sound biological decisions. Management practices should not be designed solely to provide hunting opportunity unless adequate funding becomes available for this purpose. 8 RM 1.5.7 states as a requirement :

"Maintain Quality Hunting Program- If applicable, provide a quality hunting program consistent with sound resource management. Investigate new practical ways to increase hunting opportunities conforming to USFWS policy (8 RM 5.1). Public hunting on Noxubee NWR has been ruled as not only compatible with refuge purpose but also as a established and acceptable form of public recreation.

MANAGEMENT

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- . Wildlife Management Techniques Manual, The Wildlife Society, Inc. 1980
- . White-tailed Deer Ecology and Management. 1984. A wildlife Management Institute Book. Stackpole Books. Harrisburg, PA. 870 pp.
- . Refuge Manual, USFWS, Released May 8, 1986
- . Hunting Program Guidelines, USFWS, R4, dated January, 1981
- . Hunting and Fishing Plan for Noxubee NWR, 1960
- . Amendment to the Hunting and Fishing Plan for Noxubee NWR, 1961
- . Amendment #1 to the Hunting and Fishing Plan for Noxubee NWR, 1966
- . Amendment #2 to the Hunting and Fishing Plan for Noxubee NWR, 1967
- . Amendment #3 to the Hunting and Fishing Plan for Noxubee NWR, 1968
- . Amendment #4 to the Hunting and Fishing Plan for Noxubee NWR, 1979
- . Amendment #5 to the Hunting and Fishing Plan for Noxubee NWR, 1980
- . Hunting plan for Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Round Oak, Ga. as amended 1989, USFWS
- . Compatibility Determination for big game hunting on Piedmont NWR, 1994

PLAN

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
ON
HUNTING PROGRAM
AT
NOXUBEE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The action will be the hunting program on Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Brooksville, MS. Public hunts have been held on the refuge for the last 42 years, with no significant impacts to the resource or the environment. A amendment to the existing hunt plan, however, it is not a major revision. It is, basically, an update and consolidation of the existing plan and amendments.

Of the hunts being held, two of the public hunts are considered as management actions on the refuge. The deer hunts are designed to control refuge deer population levels to help ensure that deer do not adversely impact associated plant and animal communities and hence ecological diversity and succession. In addition to ecosystem damage, deer herds out of balance with their environment also are involved in increased deer/vehicle collisions and cause public complaints about off-refuge damage. The proposed action would help limit these problems. The deer hunts would also provide compatible wildlife oriented recreation through the use of a renewable natural resource. Deer hunting at Noxubee NWR is compatible with the purpose for which the refuge was established, is biologically sound, is a cost effective management tool and will not cause notable negative impacts to other wildlife populations.

The purpose behind the raccoon hunts will be the management of the raccoon population at acceptable levels to prevent excessive predation to wood ducks, Canada geese, neotropical migrant songbirds and other ground nesting birds. Heavy predation of waterfowl nests are a documented concern of an overpopulated raccoon population. Through the use of a recreational managed hunt, it is estimated that approximately 200-300 raccoons are removed from the refuge each year. As can be imaged, without a raccoon hunt on the refuge, the population of this species would soon balloon to the point where waterfowl production would cease to exist. Raccoons have been steadily hunted in the south for over 200 years, and the hunting of this species has never significantly impacted the population as a whole. The reduction of the raccoon population will maintain the refuge population at equilibrium with the environment, and will limit depredation of waterfowl nests. It should also be noted the when raccoon populations

exceed the carrying capacity of a geographical area, that disease (rabies and/or distemper) die-offs occur. These die-offs usually result in a significant portion of the population being removed. Through the use of managed hunts, the frequency of distemper outbreaks is lessened.

The other types of hunts which are held on the refuge are strictly recreational hunts. These types of hunts include all of the upland game hunting on the refuge including turkey hunting. The primary goal behind these types of hunts are to provide outdoor recreation in the form of hunting to members of the general public. These hunts are of historical note, and have continued on the refuge for 42 years without significant impacts to the species involved, other species, or to the environment.

II.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would allow the public, through a permitting process, and through the general state seasons (dependant on type of hunt) to hunt on Noxubee NWR in accordance with current regulations.

Alternatives to this action are:

1. No action (Eliminate deer and raccoon population control, and all recreational hunts).
2. Non-public hunting deer and raccoon population control.
3. Unlimited public hunting during state seasons.

Criteria for evaluating the alternatives include:

1. Compatibility with refuge purposes.
2. Compatibility with refuge and Service objectives.
3. Cost of the alternative.
4. Public involvement.

A. PROPOSED ACTION (Preferred Alternative)

This action would permit limited public deer hunting, raccoon hunting and upland game hunting in a biologically sound manner under special seasons and special refuge regulations and restrictions.

B. NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would involve no removal or control of refuge deer, raccoon or upland game through hunting or any other means. This alternative would let nature take its course.

C. NON-PUBLIC HUNTING DEER AND RACCOON POPULATION CONTROL ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would involve methods of deer and raccoon control other than public hunting. Upland game would no longer be hunted. Methods to control deer could involve trapping and removing excess deer, the use of birth or fertility control drugs, reintroduction of predators, the use of contracted individuals with firearms to remove deer and raccoon or the control of deer and raccoon with firearms by Service personnel. Upland game populations would be allowed to fluctuate as they do naturally.

D. UNLIMITED PUBLIC HUNTING DURING STATE SEASON ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would involve allowing public hunting for deer, raccoon and upland game throughout the State seasons which runs from October 1 through March 7, and the hunting of turkey from March 20 through May 1. This alternative would see unmanaged public hunting on the refuge for a total of six and one-half months.

III.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Impacts, both beneficial and detrimental, are inherent in all management or public use activities that take place on National Wildlife Refuges. This section discusses the environmental consequences of the four alternatives included in this assessment.

A. PROPOSED ACTION (Controlled Public Hunting)

This alternative would serve as a biological management tool to limit ecosystem damage from over-browsing by deer, depredation of waterfowl by raccoons, and limited recreational upland game hunts. Populations of some other refuge wildlife would be enhanced by the deer control. Sensitive plants would be better protected. Health levels of the deer population would be enhanced reducing disease and nutrition problems. Economic problems resulting from overpopulation of deer would be reduced as car/vehicle collisions and off refuge economic damage would be limited. A biologically sound/compatible public deer hunting program would not negatively impact other refuge wildlife. A special use permit system would be used to help ensure biological soundness, safety, and to help collect hunt fees to cover the cost of the hunts. This makes the hunts one of the only cost effective management tools available for use on the refuge. The action would cause some short term disturbance of other species of wildlife. There is some conflict with other types of recreational use during the periods when hunts are conducted. Demand for public deer hunting on the refuge is not being met. There would be an ethics problem with a very limited number of hunters involving littering, illegal harvest, or other violations of regulations during the hunt periods. Waterfowl would be disturbed minimally during the hunts due to refuge closure of areas of the refuge containing the bulk of wintering waterfowl. Special raccoon hunts will be held to reduce raccoon populations, and upland game hunts will also be held.

B. NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would eliminate disturbance to other species of wildlife and would eliminate hunter ethics problems. Other recreational uses would not be displaced and there would be reduced potential for conflict between users. Over a period of time, ecosystem damage would occur and long term biodiversity would decrease due to overpopulation of the deer herd. Plant communities would be severely damaged. Some other species of wildlife would be negatively impacted. There would be a significant increase in deer/ car collisions and complaints about deer damage on adjoining land. There would probably be claims for compensation. Waterfowl reproduction would drop as predation from the expanding raccoon population increased. As the raccoon population increased there would be an rise in the number of cases of rabies and distemper reported. Damage from these cases could be requested from the Service. All of the recreation associated with the hunting programs would be lost, and costs for law enforcement to enforce this alternative would significantly increase as illegal hunting would increase. This alternative would result in serious long term ecological and economic problems for the refuge.

C. NON-PUBLIC HUNTING DEER AND RACCOON POPULATION CONTROL ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would eliminate the conflicts and problems associated with public hunting. However, most of the options associated with it are ineffective or prohibitively costly. Natural deer predators on the refuge are bobcats and coyotes. Both species take some deer but they are unable to control the deer population. The size of the refuge and the amount of agribusiness in the area preclude the introduction of larger predators that are more effective in controlling deer. Trapping/netting/darting of deer is very costly and time consuming and no area is available that desires to take more deer, especially in the numbers that would have to be removed from the refuge. Fertility control drugs, such as those tested at the University of Georgia, are at this time impractical and ineffective in controlling large, free ranging deer herds. These same parameters would be applied to the removal of raccoons through these methods. Under this alternative the hunting of upland game would be discontinued, and the recreation lost. The use of refuge or contract personnel to shoot deer and raccoon would be a very labor intensive and a very costly operation, as well as controversial with both the hunting and non-hunting public. Normal refuge operations would suffer as manpower was drained into the removal program, or through the reallocation of funds to finance the contracting of these programs. It would be many times more expensive than public hunting and would eliminate the recreation associated with public hunting.

D. PUBLIC HUNTING THROUGHOUT STATE SEASONS ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would ensure that the biological control of the refuge deer and raccoon populations would be at a level adequate to prevent damage to the ecosystem from deer, and depredation of waterfowl, neotropical songbird, and other ground nesting birds from raccoons. Deer damage to vehicles and other property would be effectively controlled and there would be a significant increase in hunting opportunity and recreation. There would be a significant time (approximately 6 1/2 months) when other uses would be displaced or impacted. Costs associated with hunting would also increase. The effort required to manage the longer hunting seasons would probably detract from other wildlife management activities on the refuge. There would be a increased disturbance to other species of refuge wildlife. The potential for conflict between hunters and non-hunters would increase.

IV.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHERS

The proposed action has been thoroughly discussed and coordinated with the refuge staff, other land management agencies in the area, biologists with the state of Mississippi and Mississippi State University. Hunt proposals are

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
HUNTING PROGRAM
ON
NOXUBEE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

I have determined that the proposed hunting management program for Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Brooksville, Mississippi, will not have a significant effect on the human environment within the meaning of Section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Accordingly, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

This determination is based on the following factors:

1. The action will not appreciably affect fish or wildlife habitat.
2. The action will not significantly impact wildlife populations.
3. There is documentation available to support the decision of hunting on the refuge.

Supporting References include:

1. Environmental Assessment
2. Environmental Action Memorandum
3. Compatibility Determination
4. Section 7 Consultation
5. 16 USC 668 dd, 50 CFR

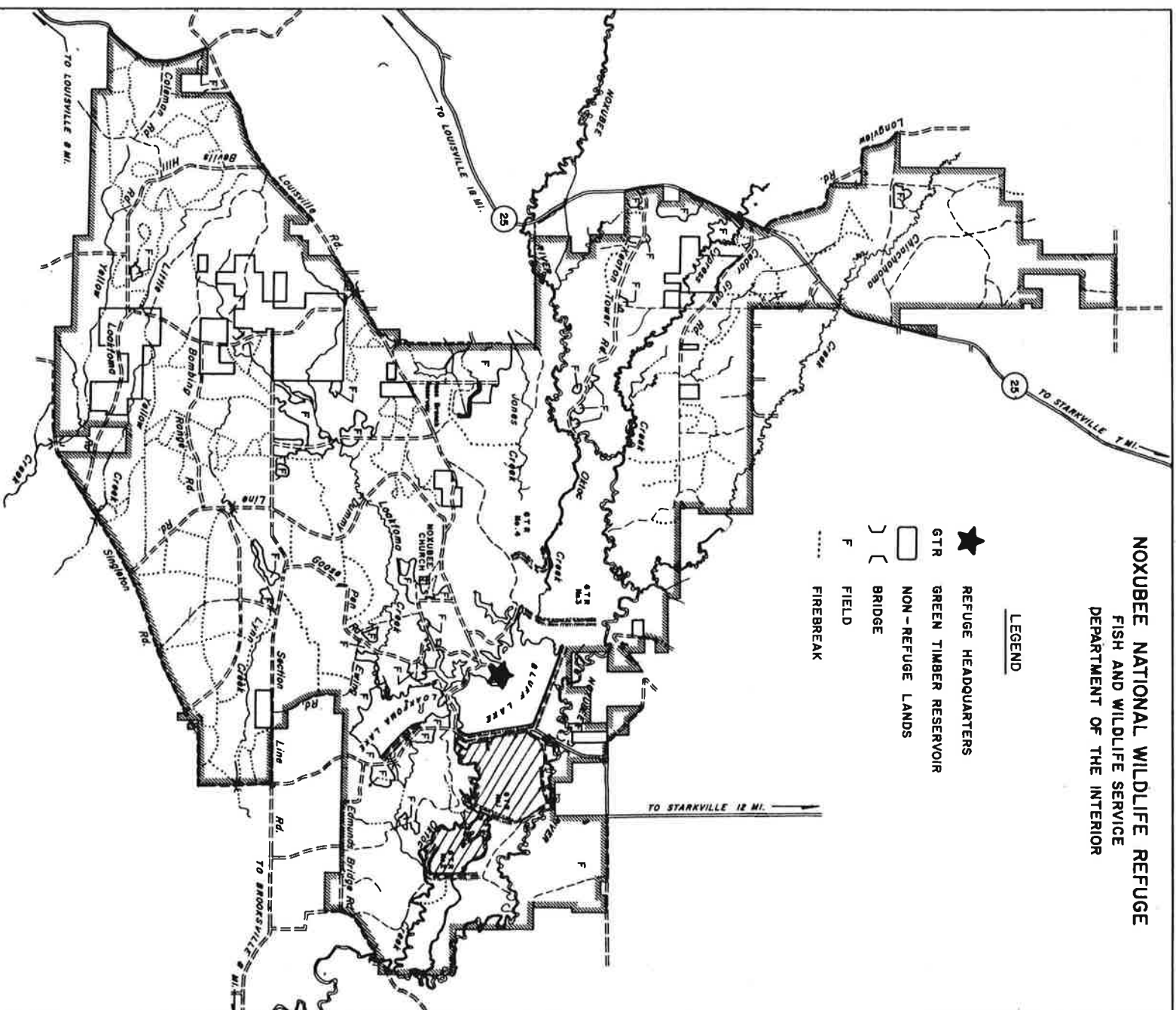
8/8/94
DATE

John E. Eadie-Stung
Acting REGIONAL DIRECTOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

LEGEND

- ★ REFUGEE HEADQUARTERS
 GTR GREEN TIMBER RESERVOIR
 □ NON-REFUGEE LANDS
) (BRIDGE
 F FIELD
 FIREBREAK



A horizontal scale bar with the word "SCALE" at the top left and "MILES" at the bottom right. The bar has tick marks and labels for 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 miles.

COMPILED IN THE DIVISION OF REALTY ATLANTA, GEORGIA

BY J.L. LORD

Federal register

Tuesday
January 19, 1993

Part II

**Department of the
Interior**

Fish and Wildlife Service

**50 CFR Parts 32 and 33
Refuge-Specific Hunting and Fishing
Regulations; Final Rule**

B Upland Game Hunting. Hunting of wild grouse, gray and fox squirrel, cottontail rabbit, jackrabbit and snowshoe hare is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition:

1. Hunting is in accordance with White Earth Reservation regulations on those parts of the Reservation that are a part of the refuge.

C Big Game Hunting. Hunting of white-tailed deer is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. Hunting is in accordance with White Earth Reservation regulations on those parts of the Reservation that are a part of the refuge.

2. The construction or use of permanent hunting platforms or stands is not permitted.

3. All stands must be removed from the refuge at the end of each day's hunt.

D Sport Fishing. Fishing is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. Fishing is permitted in North Tamara Lake and Wahboose Lake all year in accordance with State seasons.

2. Fishing is permitted on Two Island Lake, Blackbird Lake and Lost Lake from the first day of the State walleye season through the last day.

3. Bank fishing only is permitted in an area 50 yards on either side of the Ottertail River Bridges on County Roads #26 and #126 during State seasons.

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge.

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. Refer to § 32.32 Illinois for regulations.

B. Upland Game Hunting. Hunting of squirrel, rabbit, beaver, raccoon, and opossum is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

C. Big Game Hunting. Hunting of deer is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

D. Sport Fishing. [Reserved]

Hillside National Wildlife Refuge.

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. Hunting of mourning doves, ducks, coots, snipe and woodcock is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

B. Upland Game Hunting. Hunting of quail, rabbit, squirrel, beaver, raccoon, and opossum is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

C. Big Game Hunting. Hunting of white-tailed deer is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

D. Sport Fishing. [Reserved]

D. Sport Fishing. Fishing and frogging are permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. Fishing is permitted on all refuge waters year-round except for any borrow pond along the Corps of Engineers Hillside flood control levee that is designated as closed by signs.

2. Frogging is permitted on all refuge waters during the State bullfrogs season.

3. Troutines are not permitted in borrow ponds.

4. Commercial fishing is not permitted.

Mathews Brake National Wildlife Refuge.

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. Hunting of ducks, coots, snipe, and woodcock is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

B. Upland Game Hunting. Hunting of quail, rabbit, squirrel, beaver, raccoon, and opossum is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

C. Big Game Hunting. Hunting of white-tailed deer is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

D. Sport Fishing. Fishing and frogging are permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: The designated waterfowl sanctuary is closed to entry from December 1 through March 15.

Morgan Brake National Wildlife Refuge.

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. Hunting of ducks, coots, snipe, and woodcock is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

B. Upland Game Hunting. Hunting of quail, rabbit, squirrel, beaver, raccoon, and opossum is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

C. Big Game Hunting. Hunting of white-tailed deer and turkey is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

D. Sport Fishing. [Reserved]

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge.

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. Hunting of ducks and coots is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

B. Upland Game Hunting. Hunting of quail, squirrel, rabbit, beaver, raccoon and opossum is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: The bag limit for raccoon is one per day and the possession limit is two.

C. Big Game Hunting. Hunting of white-tailed deer and turkey is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

D. Sport Fishing. Fishing is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. Fishing is permitted from March 1 through October 31, except for the Noxubee River and the borrow pits along Highway 25 which are open year-round.

2. Fishing is permitted only from sunrise to sunset. Boats may not be left on the refuge overnight.

3. Lumb lines, snag lines and hand grappling are prohibited in the Bluff and Lookoma Lakes. Only nongame fish may be taken with a bow.

4. All troilene material must be cotton twine. One troilene per person and no more than two per boat.

5. The length limit for largemouth bass taken from Lookoma and Ross Branch Lakes is less than 12 inches and more than 15 inches. Largemouth bass from 12 inches to 15 inches must be released unharmed.

6. Boats are restricted to no-wake speed on all refuge waters.

Panther Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. Hunting of ducks, coots, snipe, and woodcock is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

B. Upland Game Hunting. Hunting of quail, rabbit, squirrel, beaver, raccoon, and opossum is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

C. Big Game Hunting. Hunting of white-tailed deer is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

D. Sport Fishing. [Reserved]

St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. [Reserved]

B. Upland Game Hunting. [Reserved]

C. Big Game Hunting. [Reserved]

D. Sport Fishing. Sport fishing is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following conditions:

1. Fishing and access is permitted during daylight hours only from March 1 through September 15 in areas designated by refuge signs and/or leaflets with the exception that fishing and access may be permitted year-round in some areas if designated by refuge signs and/or leaflets.

2. Access to the refuge fishing areas is restricted to roads and trails designated by refuge signs and/or leaflets.

3. Boats may not be left on the refuge overnight.

Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge.

A. Hunting of Migratory Game Birds. Hunting of mourning doves is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Doves may be taken when the dove hunting season coincides with the refuge squirrel and rabbit hunting seasons.

B. Upland Game Hunting. Hunting of squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, and furbearers is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

C. Big Game Hunting. Hunting of white-tailed deer and turkey is permitted on designated areas of the refuge subject to the following condition: Permits are required.

D. Sport Fishing. [Reserved]

§ 32.44 Mississippi.

The following refuge units have been opened for hunting and/or fishing, and

COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION
OF
NOXUBEE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE HUNTING PROGRAM

STATION NAME: Noxubee NWR DATE ESTABLISHED: 6/14/40

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY: Executive Order 8444, dated 6-14-40

PURPOSE(S) FOR WHICH THE REFUGE WAS ESTABLISHED:

"... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife ..."
Executive Order 8444, dated June 14, 1940
and

"... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 United States Code (USC) § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)

REFUGE OBJECTIVES:

As defined in 16 USC 668dd, Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations(50 CFR), Subchapter C, part 25, Subpart A, 25.11.b:refuges are established for the restoration, preservation, development and management of wildlife and wildlands habitat; for the protection and preservation of endangered or threatened species and their habitat; and for the management of wildlife and wildlands to obtain the maximum benefits from these resources. Also, there are the goals and objectives of the National Wildlife Refuge System, as defined in the Refuge Manual, that provide the framework for refuge objectives which are:

1. Threatened and endangered species maintenance and production.
2. Migratory bird maintenance and production.
3. Maintenance of native habitat types and their associated wildlife species.
4. Environmental education.
5. Wildlife interpretation.
6. Compatible wildlife oriented recreation.

OTHER APPLICABLE LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES:

1. National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended (16 USC 668dd-668ee; 80 Stat. 927).
2. Refuge Recreation Act as amended (16 USC 460k-460k-4). 50 CFR, Parts 26-32.
3. The Refuge Manual, USFWS.
4. Antiquities Act of 1906 (34 Stat. 225).
5. Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 as amended (15 USC 703-711; 40 Stat. 755).
6. Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929 (16 USC 715r: 45 Stat. 1222.
7. Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act of 1934 (16 USC 718-178h: 48 Stat. 451.
8. Criminal Code Provisions of 1940 (18 USC 41).
9. Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC 668-668d; 54 Stat.250).
10. Refuge Trespass Act of June 25, 1948 (18 USC 41; 62 Stat. 686).
11. Fish & Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 USC 742a-742j; 70 Stat.1119).
12. Refuge Recreation Act of 1962 (16 USC 460k-460k-4; 76 Stat. 653).
13. Wilderness Act (16 USC 1131; 78 Stat. 890).
14. Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965.
15. National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 USC 470, et seq.; 80 Stat. 915).
16. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, NEPA (42 USC 4321, et seq.; 83 Stat. 852).
17. Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands (Executive Order 11644, as amended by Executive Order 10989).
18. Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 USC 1531 et seq.; 87 Stat. 884).
19. Refuge Revenue Sharing Act of 1935, as amended in 1978 (16 USC 715s; 92 Stat. 1319).
20. National Wildlife Refuge Regulations for the Most Recent Fiscal Year (50 CFR Subchapter C; 43 CFR 3101.3-3).
21. Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (S.B. 740).
22. North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1990.
23. Food Security Act (Farm Bill) of 1990 as amended (HR 2100).
24. The Property Clause of the U.S. Constitution, Article IV 3, Clause 2.
25. The Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 8.
26. The Refuge Administrative Manual, USFWS.
27. Archeological Resource Protection Act of 1979 (16 USC s-470aa).
28. The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED USE:

The Noxubee NWR hunting program.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS ON REFUGE PURPOSE:

The biological implications of an uncontrolled white-tailed deer population are well documented and accepted through research over a period of many years. They can become so numerous that they may adversely affect associated plant and animal communities, and hence alter ecological diversity and succession (Warren). This may result in significant negative impacts on both plant and other animal communities including some of special concern or of Service trust responsibility. The permitted use will result in approximately 500-700 deer being taken from the refuge herd each year. This reduction of deer numbers will maintain the refuge deer population at equilibrium with its environment and limit ecosystem damage from overbrowsing by deer. There will be some disturbance to other species of refuge wildlife, however there has been no indication that it has or will cause biological problems for these other species. Reduction of the deer population also helps maintain good health in the refuge herd and greatly reduces disease and nutrition related problems.

Heavy predation of waterfowl nests are a documented concern of a overpopulated raccoon population. Through the use of a recreational managed hunt, it is estimated that approximately 200-300 raccoons are removed from the refuge each year. As can be imaged, without a raccoon hunt on the refuge, the population of this species would soon balloon to the point where waterfowl production would cease to exist. Raccoons have been steadily hunted in the south for over 200 years, and the hunting of the species has never significantly impacted the population as a whole. The reduction of the raccoon population will maintain the refuge population at equilibrium with the environment, and will limit depredation of waterfowl nests. It should also be noted the when raccoon populations exceed the carrying capacity of a geographical area, that distemper and rabies die-offs occur. These die-offs usually result in a significant portion of the population being removed. Unfortunately, both rabies and distemper pose a threat to humans, domestic animals and other wildlife. Through the use of managed hunts, the frequency of rabies and distemper outbreaks is lessened.

Anticipated affects of upland game hunting are expected to be minimal.

DETERMINATION: This use is compatible X This use is not compatible

(Check One)

NEPA COMPLIANCE: (Environmental Action Memorandum Attached)

 Categorical Exclusion

 X Environmental Assessment

 Environmental Impact Statement

 X FONSI

STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:

1. Biological data will be collected and analyzed to ensure that the hunts held are biologically sound and that the refuge deer herd is being controlled to the point of preventing damage to the ecosystem by deer.
2. An annual hunt evaluation report will be prepared by refuge staff which will discuss compatibility, and will be reviewed and approved by regional office staff.
3. Hunting season dates and regulations will be coordinated with biologists on station, Regional, at Mississippi State University and with Mississippi DWFP and their biologists.
4. An active law enforcement program will ensure regulation compliance and will protect refuge resources.
5. Vehicle use will be restricted to regularly maintained roads.
6. Waterfowl populations on the refuge must exceed pre-1975 levels in order for a general season to be held. However, special youth hunts could be held at the managers discretion, providing waterfowl population levels are sufficient.

JUSTIFICATION:

As per 8 RM 5.3 (A)(1&2), the management purpose of Noxubee NWR is governed under the rules of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (see Refuge Purpose), and as such has never opened more than 40 % of its wetland acreage for the purpose of waterfowl hunting. Actually the area of the refuge ever opened for waterfowl hunting is only 18.75% of the total wetland acreage (see section on Waterfowl). As further detailed under 8 RM 5.3 (A)(2),.... "Classification as an inviolate sanctuary imposes no restrictions or limitations on the hunting of non-migratory birds or other game mammals."

The big game and raccoon hunts are being used as management tools to protect the diverse refuge ecosystem from the damage which would result from too many animals. Through the use of the deer and raccoon hunts not only would the habitat of resident wildlife be protected in this manner, but also that of many species of breeding migratory birds. The hunting of raccoons would reduce the overall population of this species to lower impacts of predation on waterfowl nests. The upland game hunts are steeped in history and have caused no negative impacts to species involved or the ecosystem. 16 USC 668dd, 50 CFR, 26.31 states: "Public recreation will be permitted on National Wildlife Refuges as a appropriate incidental or secondary use, only after it has been determined that such recreational use is practicable and not inconsistent with the primary objectives for which each particular area was established or with other authorized Federal operations." It has been determined that hunting is a compatible use of the refuge and would not violate any provisions of this code. The reduction of the number of

deer on the refuge will help reduce the number of deer/car collisions that occur on and adjacent to the refuge, and also reduce the number of deer damage complaints from refuge neighbors. The only biological and cost effective method of balancing the refuge deer population with its environment is through public hunting. The upland game hunting on the refuge satisfies provisions of 50 CFR and the refuge manual by providing a quality hunting experience and thousands of hours of wholesome outdoor recreation. There is good public involvement throughout the hunt planning and evaluation process with comments received from both the hunting and the non-hunting members of the public. Through the presentation of programs, contacts with various groups, letters to the refuge, letters to publications, and hunter notes, the public is actively involved in the process of decision making. After the thirty-day comment period, and review of all elements considered in the Environmental Assessment, the proposed alternative was selected. Enclosed in the Environmental Assessment on the Noxubee Hunting Program (See Attachment 2) are the statistics from public comments received during the public comment period. There will be no notable negative population impacts to any other refuge wildlife, and the hunts will enhance refuge purposes.

Prepared by: Jim L. Tisdale 6/16/94
(Name/Title/Signature/Date)

Reviewed by: James Stewart / Acting District Manager / 8/3/94
(Name/Title/Signature/Date)

Sam O. Under Jr. / Asst / 8-4-94
(Name/Title/Signature/Date)

REFUGE RECREATION ACT FUNDING ANALYSIS
FOR
HUNTING

STATION NAME: Noxubee NWR DATE ESTABLISHED: 6/14/40

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY: Executive Order 8444, dated 6-14-40

PURPOSE(S) FOR WHICH THE REFUGE WAS ESTABLISHED:


"... as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife ..." Executive Order 8444, dated June 14, 1940
and

"... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." 16 United States Code (USC) § 715d (Migratory Bird Conservation Act)

FUNDING REQUIRED TO ADMINISTER AND MANAGE THE RECREATIONAL USE(S):

Approximately \$22,700.00 is necessary to properly manage these activities.

Based on a review of the refuge budget allocated for recreational use management, I certify that funding is adequate to ensure compatibility and to administer and manage recreational use(s).


Authorized by: Jim L. Tisdale, Refuge Manager, July 22, 1994
(Name/Title/Signature/Date)


UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION MEMORANDUM


Within the spirit and intent of the council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and have determined that the action of:


Public hunting according to provisions of published hunt plan on Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge.

- ☐ - is a categorical exclusion as provided by 516 DM 6 Appendix 1. No further documentation will be made.
- ☒ - is found not to have significant environmental effects as determined by the attached Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact.
- ☐ - is found to have special environmental conditions as described in the attached Environmental Assessment. The attached Finding of No Significant Impact will not be final nor any actions taken pending a 30-day period of public review.
- ☐ - is found to have significant effects, and therefore a "Notice of Intent" will be published in the Federal Register to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement before the project is considered further.
- ☐ - is denied because of environmental damage, Service policy, or mandate.
- ☐ - is an emergency situation. Only those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency will be taken. Other related actions remain subject to NEPA review.

Other supporting documents:
Compatibility Statement
Environmental Assessment


Initiator Date 7/22/94
Jim L. Tisdale/Refuge Manager


James E. Smith 8/3/94
Acting District Manager


Acting Regional Director Date 8/4/94
John C. Eubank
Acting RM/ABD Hf Date 8-4-94
DEC/REC Date

SECTION 7 EVALUATION

REGION: 4

LOCATION (ATTACH MAP):

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Oktibbeha, Noxubee, and Winston Counties, Mississippi.

LISTED SPECIES OR CRITICAL HABITAT CONSIDERED:

Red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) - E
American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) - T
Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) - E
Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) - State Endangered

NAME AND DESCRIPTION:

Public hunting of white-tailed deer, turkey, and small game on Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTION:

To continue the public hunt of white-tailed deer, turkey, and small game on Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge. The objectives of the action are (1) to maintain, through an annual regulated harvest, an appropriate number of deer on the refuge relative to the available habitat to control/minimize potential overbrowse from deer exceeding carrying capacity and thereby ensuring the overall health of the deer population, (2) to control the relative number of raccoons, through an annual regulated harvest, a portion of the raccoon population to minimize depredation of nesting waterfowl (wood duck, hooded merganser, and Canada goose) and other nesting resident birds especially, neotropical migrants, (3) to reduce and maintain the number of beaver, through incidental harvest during other public hunts, to prevent damage to bottomland hardwoods and other forested areas important for waterfowl, (4) to eliminate feral hogs, through incidental harvest during other public hunts, to prevent their increase and subsequent destruction of habitat and loss of resident wildlife, (5) to control the relative population of coyote, through incidental harvest during other public hunts, to minimize the loss of nesting and molting waterfowl, and (6) to allow the annual regulated harvest of the turkey and small game populations for outdoor recreational purposes.

EXPLANATION OF IMPACT ON LISTED SPECIES OR CRITICAL HABITAT:

Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) - Public hunting of all listed species in the hunt plan should have no adverse effects on the red-cockaded woodpecker. Hunting has previously been conducted

within the cluster and associated foraging habitat of the RCW on the refuge without long-term disturbance. Hunters walking within clusters after dark or near dusk may temporarily displace a roosting RCW from a cavity. However, this type of disturbance would be infrequent. Turkey hunting overlaps incubation with nesting RCW but is unlikely to be a problem because turkey hunters would not be attempting to take gobblers in the open RCW clusters.

Bald eagle - Presently there are no active bald eagle nests on the refuge. The last nest attempt by eagles was in 1981 in the upper end of Bluff Lake which is in the no hunting zone. An artificial raptor (eagle) nesting platform that was erected in 1993 has not been utilized. Each fall and winter, 3-4 bald eagles and 1 golden eagle are regular seen around Bluff and Loakfoma Lakes, GTR# 3, and the Priscock Field. Each of these areas is also either closed to public entry or to hunting. No disturbance to wintering eagles is expected.

American alligator - The refuge has a population of >50 adult and subadult alligators. The present population has primarily maintained itself through recruitment. Most of these animals are located in the 2 lakes on the refuge and GTR# 3 which are closed to hunting, but individual alligators are occasionally found in the many sloughs, oxbows, and ponds on the refuge. Because of the habitat preference of the alligator, no disturbance to it is expected from hunting. The potential exists for illegal hunting of alligators on an as opportunity exits basis. However, poaching alligators is not a major concern.

Wood stork - This is a state listed endangered species that occurs on the refuge during July through early fall each year. The subspecies of wood stork is believed to be from Texas and consists of nonbreeding individuals and does not represent the federally endangered subspecies from the east coast. Wood storks are only found around Bluff and Loakfoma Lakes, GTR# 3, and the Priscock Field. These areas are closed to hunting and no disturbance to them is expected through public hunting. In most years, wood storks have migrated prior to the opening of the first public hunt on the refuge in October.

RECOMMENDATION TO AVOID ANY IMPACTS:

Red-cockaded woodpecker - Continue to educate the public concerning the RCW and the reliance of the bird on living old-growth pines for constructing roost and nest cavities. When necessary, make hunters aware of potential disturbance within RCW clusters and have them relocate tree stands.

Bald eagle - Presently, the no hunting zone around the lakes and GTR# 3 adequately prevent disturbance to wintering eagles. However, if nesting should occur on the refuge, sufficient area around the nest and undisturbed access to the lakes for feeding would be made available. This would include the closure of

certain areas open to hunting or the general public. In addition, continue to educate the public about the eagles on the refuge and the importance of waterfowl as a food source for eagles.

American alligator - Continue to educate the public concerning the presence of the alligator on the refuge and the legal protection that it receives.

Wood stork - Continue to educate the public concerning the presence of this bird on the refuge. The no hunting zone around the lakes and GTR# 3 adequately prevent disturbance to wood storks. In most years, the majority of wood storks have migrated prior to the opening of hunting on the refuge.

SECTION 7 EVALUATION

PAGE 2

PROJECT LEADER Jim Lindale DATE: 6/22/94
MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: _____ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: ✓
COMMENTS:

ENDANGERED SPECIES SUPERVISOR Mike Muehle DATE: 8/18/94
MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: _____ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: X
COMMENTS:

Acting
ARD-RW Jim O. Ordean, Jr. DATE: 8/26/94
MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: _____ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: X
COMMENTS:

ARD-FA _____ DATE: _____
MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: _____ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: _____
COMMENTS:

REGIONAL DIRECTOR _____ DATE: _____
MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT: _____ NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT: _____
COMMENTS: